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MANAGEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

U. S. Department of Agriculture

A summary of significant events of
interest to USDA management

FEB 6 '78

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February 21, 1977

ERS-EEO CONFERENCE.....ERS held its first ever EEO Awareness Conference on February 2-4, for all DC area employees. The objective of the Conference was to create a better awareness of the EEO program and its objectives.

At the Conference kickoff session, the Assistant Secretary for Administration spoke on the need for more realistic and progressive civil rights and equal opportunity actions in the Department and the need for active participation by employees at all levels to insure EEO effectiveness. The session also included speakers and a formal discussion on the effects of employee attitudes toward the spirit and intent of EEO. Employees also participated in workshops covering 2 1/2 days.

The ERS-EEO Advisory Committee, which coordinated the Conference, is currently reviewing suggestions and other feedback from employees and evaluating issues raised during the Conference. Based on this review, it will recommend a plan of action to ERS management. (Contact: Allan Johnson, ERS, ext. 78066)

OEO CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE REVIEW PROJECT.....OEO's Compliance and Enforcement Division (CED) conducted a Department-wide evaluation of agency compliance review procedures to determine the effectiveness of these review procedures for monitoring compliance with civil rights laws and regulations. Based on observations from this project, OEO plans to recommend that agencies standardize review approaches, develop systematic evaluation and coordination, and conduct fewer but more intensive reviews. OEO will develop a training package for reviewers and strengthen its monitoring procedures. This effort will continue to be fully coordinated with affected agencies. (Contact: Richard J. Peer, OEO, ext. 77327)

SPACE CONSULTANT CONTRACT.....Review of the prototypal space design concept has been completed. The contractor is stressing involvement of agency personnel in the planning process to insure that the final layout will provide a practical and efficient environment tailored to agency needs. Review of the proposed layouts began on February 17. Phase IV, the Short-term Action Plan, is currently in a holding pattern. (Contact: Al Cauley, OO, ext. 72815)

ENERGY CONSERVATION.....Agency replies to the call from the Assistant Secretary for Administration for FY 77 energy conservation goals have been reviewed by OO and OMF. With agency cooperation, the initial projected increase in FY 77 over FY 75 consumption of 19.8 percent has been reduced to 8.6 percent. This proposed increase is expected to be approved by FEA since agencies clearly showed how further reductions would adversely affect program missions. (Contact: Bob Welch, OO, ext. 77557)

NATIONAL FINANCE CENTER NEWS.....

- ...MODE Conversion - A four-person project team has been established at the NFC to develop recommendations regarding conversion of the MODE payroll/personnel system to a programming language capable of being processed with third generation computer equipment. The team will work with agencies and other groups within and outside USDA to identify various alternatives available and to develop a detailed plan for actual conversion. The actual conversion effort will begin in FY 1978.
- ...Collection of Excessive Travel Advances - Approximately \$160,000 in excessive travel advances that were not certified as necessary have been deducted from the pay checks of 613 employees. This action is a direct result of demand letters which were sent to 3,949 employees last December showing excessive amounts of \$2,319,168. Most of the advances covered by the demand letters were cleared or certified as necessary for planned needs.
- ...Fiscal Officers Meeting - Agency fiscal officers met at the NFC in New Orleans on February 9-10 to improve the working relationship between NFC and agencies and to provide information to fiscal officers about NFC systems, activities and plans and to seek their suggestions for improved NFC operations.

As a result of this meeting it was agreed to hold periodic meetings between NFC staff and fiscal officers and to hold orientation sessions at the NFC for agency fiscal technicians. In addition, it was agreed that the NFC would improve correspondence handling procedures, provide direction on development of financial management requirements for the Central Accounting System and would establish the mechanism for providing increased information to agencies. Agencies will develop a procedure for documenting ongoing problems relating to the centralized systems and promptly apprise the NFC.

FY 78 BUDGET.....President Carter is currently scheduled to present amendments to the Ford FY 78 Budget to the Congress on February 22.

USDA hearings before the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees have been rescheduled so that the Secretary will appear after the President has submitted his amendments.

The Secretary is currently scheduled to appear before the House Committee on March 1 and 2. The Secretary's appearance before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee has not yet been scheduled. (Contact: Bob Sherman, OMF, ext. 76176)

PUBLIC LAW 94-519.....Public Law 94-519 was recently enacted to allow for the transfer of Federal excess personal property, through state clearing-houses, for distribution within states based on priorities established by the Governors' offices.

The law discourages direct transfer to grantees by imposing on the Federal transferor a fee of 25% of the acquisition cost which would then be payable to the Treasury. In USDA, only the Forest Service, with its Cooperative Forest Fire Control Program, is exempt from this provision. This portion of the law has serious impact on the Cooperative Extension Service. Accordingly, the Extension Committee on Policy has decided to seek legislative relief. OO and ES are working together to develop the necessary background and legislative proposal. (Contact: Bob Welch, OO, ext. 77557)

PUBLIC-USE FORM REPORTING REDUCTIONS..... In July 1976, President Ford set as a goal a 5% reduction in the hours required by the public to respond to government requests for information. This reduction is to be accomplished by the end of FY 77. An additional reduction of 15-25% is to be reached by the end of FY 78. To date, 8 agencies have already exceeded the FY 77 goal of 5% reduction.

	%		%
ASCS	5.7	FNS	8.6
AMS	17.0	FS	61.1
ERS	61.2	SCS	6.6
ES	81.3	SRS	7.8

The other agencies have not achieved the 5% reduction and three agencies have made no reduction to date. (Contact: Donald Barrowman, SRS, ext. 76201)

SENATE COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION..... On February 4, the Senate agreed to S. Res. 4, reorganizing the committee system of the Senate. Among the 12 major Senate committees established were those on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; Energy and Natural Resources; Environment and Public Works; Governmental Affairs; and Human Resources. The resolution continued the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs until December 31, 1977, after which time its functions will be absorbed by the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

The committees' jurisdictions will, in most cases, mirror those of their 94th Congress counterparts. However, responsibility over the school nutrition programs was transferred from the old Labor and Public Welfare to the new Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and responsibility for agricultural colleges from the old Agriculture and Forestry to the new Committee on Human Resources.

The resolution limits each Senator to service on no more than three committees and eight subcommittees, and prohibits any Senator from chairing a total of more than four committees and subcommittees, three after the current Congress.

S. Res. 4 also authorized establishment of a centralized computer system to schedule meetings of committees and subcommittees and guarantees minority members a proportional share of the committee's staff and resources. (Contact: Al Duran, OMF, ext. 74654)

USDA MANAGEMENT PLAN..... The FY 77-78 USDA Management Plan (in compliance with A-113) outlines and tracks, under one system, the Department's major management projects. In this year's plan, Departmental management initiatives, Presidential initiatives, significant program studies and policy/program objectives are covered.

OMF tracks these activities and has made an initial assessment of progress. This first assessment of project accomplishment indicates that of the 56 management improvement projects, 32 are behind schedule. These projects include the 35 management initiatives approved at the Gettysburg Conference last May. Of the 16 major studies and audits, one is behind schedule. And, of the 129 program/policy objectives tracked, 23 are delayed or require revision.

Of the total 201 projects, 56 or approximately 28% are behind schedule. Many of the delayed management projects are in a "holding position" pending further review and evaluation by OMB and others.

(Contact: Jim Olmes, OMF, ext. 73226)

CONTROL OF "ASSISTANT TO" POSITIONS.....One of the Presidential Management Initiatives for FY 77 requires Departments and Agencies to issue guidelines on the establishment and control of "Assistant to" positions. The Assistant Secretary for Administration contacted OMB regarding this, but they were not prepared to take a position at this time. We will await guidelines from OMB before proceeding on this matter. (Contact: Joe Logan, OP, ext. 77131)

MERIT PROMOTION PLAN.....A draft of the Department's merit promotion plan has been sent to agencies for final review of the total plan, supporting forms, agency supplements and the impact on other personnel programs. Agency representatives will meet on March 4 and March 18 to make final changes and clear the material for printing and distribution. (Contact: Bill Parent, OP, ext. 78721)

PERSONNEL INTERCHANGE PROCESS (PIP).....The PIP program is designed to provide on-the-job developmental experiences for selected GS-13's to GS-16's through permanent assignments, details, task force assignments, or special projects on an interagency basis. To date, all but 3 agencies of the Department are participating in this program and a total of 17 participants have been nominated for assignments. Twelve assignments have been negotiated, 6 participants are in their first assignments and 3 have completed their initial assignments.

The PIP assignments range from 30 days to one year and the nature of these assignments range from an understudy to the Deputy Administrator for Management to planning an executive development program for staff offices. (Contact: Tom Gill, OP, ext. 74258)

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION.....The recently passed Higher Education Amendment (Public Law 94-482) provides for increased amounts of funds available to colleges and universities for Cooperative Education Programs. It also allows the colleges and universities to make 5-year agreements rather than 3-year agreements previously authorized. The amendment should help to increase the Cooperative Education Program participants in USDA. (Contact: Gloria Torres, OP, ext. 72973)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS STUDY.....Phase I of the Network Analysis Corporation's Telecommunications Study is complete and is being staffed internally within ADS. Future plans call for briefings to the ADP Policy Advisory Board and the Resource Exchange Program group. (Contact: R. Head, ADS, ext. 77543)

HOW'S YOUR FOG INDEX?.....The President has shown interest in the rules Government agencies impose on the public. He wants to make them easy to understand. If you want to know how hard your writing is to understand, try Form AD-371, Fog Index Readability Appraisal. This form is based on Robert Gunning's Fog Index Formula, from The Technique Of Clear Writing, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc. Form AD-371 also appears on the reverse side of Form AD-116, Clearance and Approval Sheet For Departmental Directives. (Contact: P. J. Doyle, OMF, ext. 75725)